

CHAPTER XII

PASSFIELD

ENTERING Parliament in the autumn of 1922, Sidney Webb remained in active politics until the autumn of 1931—a period of nine years. After a twelve-month absence as a private member, he became in 1924, for nine months, President of the Board of Trade. From 1924 on, there followed a spell of four and a half years during which the Labour Party was in opposition, in 1928, seeing that an election could not be long delayed, and foreseeing that it would bring about a very close balance of parties, and, possibly, another period of Labour minority rule, he determined to withdraw. His view then was that having gone in "under compulsion"⁵ and served for six years, he was entitled to come out. He had, as he put it, "other things to do", things really more congenial. Moreover he was on the eve of being seventy. He was not permitted to carry out this intention, instead, he stayed on, to be, for a second time, a Minister of the Crown, and to become what his wife called "the individual who goes under the fantastical name of Lord Passfield."

His parliamentary experience covers, therefore, one of the most difficult and diversified periods of British political history, as of the history of the world. It was a period throughout overshadowed by the grim and threatening economic consequences of the war and of the Peace Treaties, haunted by the spectres of Militarism and Nationalism, and darkened by the instant presence in most countries of grave Unemployment and acute industrial dislocation.

and distress.
If some people, early on in this period, began
to talk of the